

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell and fellow lawmakers spent this morning "grilling VA officials... about 'serious inadequacies of care' at the main veterans' hospital for the Charlotte area" in an effort to improve veterans' care nationwide. [Source: Charlotte Observer, April 19, 2007]

"We have a responsibility to make sure our veterans are getting the care they deserve," said Mitchell. "Investigating what happened at the North Carolina facility can help VA fix problems and take action to ensure that these kind of terrible situations don't happen at other VA facilities as too."

Mitchell chaired a House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations for Veterans' Affairs hearing that examined issues regarding surgical and nursing services at the W.G. (Bill) Hefner VA Medical Center in Salisbury, North Carolina after reports that 12 patients died in questionable circumstances in 2004 and 2005.

According to the Charlotte Observer, "Carrol Edward Minish, 68, of Conover, died in 2004 after surgery to remove a gangrenous toe. VA investigators said the surgeon's grasp of critical information was 'rudimentary at best.'" [Source: Charlotte Observer, April 19, 2007]

Donald Moore, who served as the Hefner VA Medical Center's director from June 2004 to November 2006, is currently director of the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center in Phoenix and testified at Mitchell's hearing.

Mitchell asked Moore if there are any of the problems at Phoenix VA facility, and Moore indicated that there are not.

Mitchell toured the Hayden VA facility in March, and has expressed concern that the facility is "underfunded and understaffed in the wake of the Iraq war." [Source: The Arizona Republic, April 13, 2007]

A bipartisan group of North Carolina lawmakers requested that Mitchell hold the hearing. "I'm also very proud that Democrats and Republicans are working together on this issue," Mitchell said.